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Conference Abstract

Authenticity in an Uncertain World: Ensuring Accuracy in both the Explicit and Implicit Messages of Exhibits

Steven M. Sullivan‡, Wesley Skidmore §, George Dante|

‡ Hefner Museum of Natural History, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, United States of America
§ Monte L. Bean Museum of Natural History, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, United States of America
| Wildlife Preservations, LLC, Woodland Park, New Jersey, United States of America

Corresponding author: Steven M. Sullivan (sulliv55@miamioh.edu)

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Abstract

Do you know what a kiwi looks like - all the way down to the orientation of the nostrils? While small details won't make or break the aesthetics of an exhibit, they can have important impacts on visitor learning and future behavior.

Museums are a traditional bastion of authenticity. From the objects we exhibit to the information we share, audiences know that museums are a trustworthy source of real objects and vetted facts. We strive to ensure accurate label copy, but the traditional constraints of preservation and exhibition of natural history specimens can still convey confusing or implicitly inaccurate information. Problems like sub-standard taxidermy, faded mounts, heedless application of plants, and inaccurate social groupings abound in museums. Visitors are usually not equipped to evaluate such details, yet such details often become a baseline from which visitor's expectations of nature are derived. Therefore, accurate representations of species are an important way to convey both explicit institutional messages and implicit information about nature.

We will discuss the fundamental details that differentiate award-winning taxidermy from substandard representations of the species. We will show how to employ a few,

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fundamental principles to overcome the constraints of preservation to make mounts, dioramas, and artificial reproductions as exciting, beautiful, and accurate as possible.

Keywords

Taxidermy, authentic, visitor experience, exhibition, biophilia, accurate

Presenting author

Steven M. Sullivan

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